

The RANCH REVIEW

September 2008 Volume II, Issue IX

News for the Residents of Avery Ranch

THE GREEN CORNER

Austin's GreenChoice Renewable Energy Program

By: Sheri Hicks

Are you looking for one more way to lower your carbon footprint? Look to Austin's GreenChoice Renewable Energy Program? Back in the early days of the GreenChoice program, the lines were long, the sign-up convoluted and the wait to actually use green energy interminable. Those days are gone. Austin Energy has streamlined its GreenChoice Program and signing up is as easy as filling out an online form and clicking the button.

What is the GreenChoice Program?

GreenChoice is Austin Energy's (Austin's municipal electric utility) green energy program in which electricity is derived from clean, renewable sources.

What is different about green energy?

Green or clean energy is energy produced from clean, renewable resources. Traditional power plants use coal and natural gas (fossil fuels) that are non-renewable and also emit toxins, such as mercury, a dangerous heavy metal, into the air and ground water. Those toxins contribute heavily to air, water and land pollution and find their way into our food sources. Fossil fuel power plants are thought to be a large contributor to mercury found in dangerous levels in ocean fish such as tuna. Clean power sources do not have toxic byproducts from energy production. Clean energy is derived from sources that have an infinite supply, such as wind and sun, therefore the price should stabilize and perhaps decrease as generation and transmission technologies are developed and refined rather than increase as we have seen happen to fossil fuels over the past decade.

Where does the green energy come from?

Austin Energy has diversified its clean energy sources by contracting with developers to utilize wind, solar and biogases to power the GreenChoice program, making it available to more Austin residents than ever before. Wind power is provided by giant wind turbines located in West Texas wind farms. According to the Austin Energy website, the wind turbines alone produce enough energy to power 55,000 homes. Biogas is provided by three landfill methane gas collection sites that pipe the natural byproduct of decomposing garbage

into a generator and use it for energy. Solar energy is provided from large groups of solar panels placed in several commercial locations around Austin including the Austin-Bergstrom Airport, the Palmer Events Center parking garage and the Habitat Suites.

How much does it cost?

To support advancement of clean power, the costs of the program are slightly higher (today) than standard coal and gas produced electricity. Residential subscribers are charged 1.85 cents per kilowatt hour more than standard produced electricity which amounts to less than \$20 per month. However, those rates are locked in until 2022 whereas standard electricity may increase due to the rising costs of natural gas, a non-renewable resource that Texas relies heavily upon to meet its ever increasing power demands.

Why should I sign up?

The GreenChoice program uses renewable, clean energy sources to produce electricity. Unlike traditional coal and gas fired power plants, wind power, biogas and solar power do not add to air pollution, an issue Austin has been struggling with for several decades now. The more energy produced by clean sources, the less needed from traditional polluting sources. Austin's poor air quality was the reason behind Austin coming under the EPA mandated Emissions Control and Testing which led to emissions testing required during annual automobile inspections. While we are limited in keeping pollution from blowing in from other areas, GreenChoice is just one more way to help curb Austin's air quality issues.

How do I sign up?

Signing up is easy! Simply fill out the sign-up form on the Austin Energy GreenChoice website at www.austinenenergy.com. After you sign up, you will receive a postcard (printed on recycled paper) welcoming you to the GreenChoice Program. The GreenChoice charge will replace the standard fuel charge on your energy bill within 60 days. If you sign up and fail to receive the postcard or see the change in energy source charge on your bill, you should contact Austin Energy at 494-9400.

Don't want to wait for the mail?
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THE RANCH REVIEW

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Locks of Love Kickoff

Locks of Love is a not-for-profit organization that provides free hairpieces to children 18 years and younger in the US and Canada suffering from any type of medical hair loss.

Girls ranging in age from 3 years old to “Moms” have signed up to donate their luxurious locks to kids who cannot grow their own hair. Moms and daughters have joined together to support this great cause. Girls from all over Austin, including Georgetown, Round Rock, South Austin, Steiner Ranch, Grand View Hills, River Place and Leander are participating. Many local Girl Scout Troops (including one entire Troop) and their leaders are also among the participants. Each contributing Girl Scout will earn a Merit Badge.

It's not too late to donate your long tresses to this most deserving group of kids. Hair must be ten inches long at time of cut and can be colored, but not highlighted or permed.

The next event created for these great girls is a fabulous “Girls Night Out”. There will be more fun activities in store for the donors until December. Mom and Daughter teams are encouraged to join in on the merriment.all in the name of fun, fun fun!

Local businesses have come together to support and help implement Sandra's idea. For more information, contact Sandra Bennett at 512-372-3500.

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Austin Sees Little Change

Submitted by Weston Sythoff

The Austin area came through yet another month relatively unscathed by recent national economic trends. Though the area saw total non-agricultural employment decrease by 200 jobs in June, this reduction was caused by seasonal employment decline due to the summer break for universities and local school districts.

"While overall job growth declined, it's important to note that aside from Government, which lost 4,000 jobs, nearly every other industry saw growth," said Alan Miller, executive director of Workforce Solutions.

Leisure and Hospitality led area growth with an increase of 1,200 jobs in June 2008. Over the last year, Leisure and Hospitality has grown by 2,800 jobs, a rate of 3.5%. Mining & Construction, Manufacturing, and Finance all experienced healthy growth, adding 800, 600, and 400 jobs, respectively. Retail Trade added 300 jobs and has gained 2,500 jobs since June of 2007, for an annual growth rate of 3.1%. The only other industry to lose jobs was Professional and Business Services,

which declined by only 200.

The annual growth rate for all sectors in the Austin-Round Rock MSA* was 1.8% with a total job growth of 13,900 over the last 12 months.

According to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the unemployment rate for the Austin-Round Rock MSA in May 2008 rose slightly to 4.2 percent. The rate was 3.9% one year ago.

The unemployment rate for Texas was 4.4 percent, and the U.S. rate was 5.5%.

Workforce Solutions – Capital Area Workforce Board is a non-profit workforce development organization that serves the businesses and residents of Travis County. The mission of Workforce Solutions is to lead an innovative, high quality workforce system that ensures the economic viability of the region.

*The Austin-Round Rock Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) consists of Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson counties.

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Newsletter Article Submissions

Interested in submitting an article? You can do so by emailing averyranch@peelinc.com or by going to <http://www.peelinc.com/articleSubmit.php>. All news must be received by the 9th of the month prior to the issue. So if you are involved with a school group, scouts, sports etc – please submit your articles for the Ranch Review. Personal news for the Stork Report, Teenage Job Seekers, special celebrations and military service are also welcome.

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Nature Watch

by Jim and Lynne Weber

Hummingbird Highways

One of the most abundant jewels in Texas, the black-chinned hummingbird may be small, but its' fall migration is a feat of gigantic proportions!

Measuring a mere three and one-half inches long with a three and three-quarter-inch wing span, this hummingbird weighs only three to three and one-half grams, which is about equivalent to the weight of a dime plus a dollar bill. The male is dull metallic green above, gray below, black on the chin and upper throat, with an iridescent violet lower throat known as a gorget (pronounced gore-jet). The female lacks the characteristic coloring on the chin, upper throat, and lower throat.

Like all hummingbirds, nectar serves as its main food source, fueling the tiny bird's extreme metabolism. These hummingbirds feed on several species of plants, most notably native penstemons, agaves, salvias, sages, and honeysuckles. While artificial feeders supplement their diet, they also prey on insects and spiders, particularly during nesting season, which gives them the dietary fat and protein necessary to breed.

The black-chinned hummingbird's unique skeletal structure allows them to fly forwards, backwards, sideways,

and even on their backs! This requires a wingbeat frequency of about 50 beats per second, and massive muscles that make up a third of their tiny body weight. While the males perform an elaborate flight display during courtship, no pair bond is formed between the males and females. Females build the tiny nest (out of spider webs, mosses, and various plant fibers), incubate the eggs, and raise the young, while the males are feeding and off chasing other females. This is unusual among birds as a whole, since this class of animals exhibits the greatest amount of monogamy among vertebrates (animals with a backbone or spinal column).

While most biologists believe that the shortening length of daylight hours triggers fall migration, the black-chinned hummingbird begins its long journey south from Texas in September, to spend the winter in western Mexico. The number of birds migrating south may be twice that of the northward trip in the spring, since it includes all immature birds that hatched during the summer, as well as surviving adults.

Amazingly, for a newly hatched hummingbird, there is no memory of past migrations, only an urge to put on a lot of weight, fly in a particular direction for a certain amount of time and hundreds of miles, and look for a good place to over-winter. Once it learns such

(Continued on Page 6)

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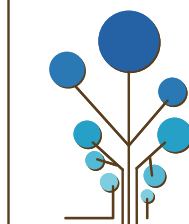
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Recipe of the Month:

Lemon Ice Box Cake

Submitted by Madra Ford



- 1 yellow cake mix
- 2 cans sweetened condensed milk (Eagle Brand)
- 1/2 cup fresh lemon juice
- 1 8oz. container Cool Whip

Bake cake as directed for two layers. When cool, slice each layer in half, making four layers. In a bowl combine condensed milk with lemon juice.....reserve 1/2 cup & set aside for frosting.

Use remaining juice/milk mixture as a filling between the four layers. With reserved mixture, gently fold in the Cool Whip and frost entire cake. Holes can be poked in cake so frosting is absorbed. This is better if made a day or two in advance.

If you would like to submit YOUR recipe email it to articles@peelinc.com.

Nature Watch - (Continued from Page 5)



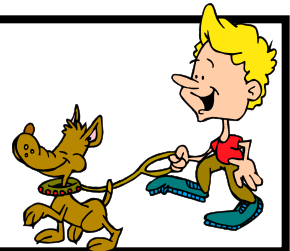
a route, a bird may retrace it every year as long as it lives! There is evidence that fall and spring migration routes differ, with the hummingbirds following the Texas coast back into Mexico in the fall and crossing non-stop over the Gulf of Mexico on their way north in the spring. Perhaps the hurricane season is a factor, and these birds have developed an innate sense to avoid the Gulf during its most precarious weather season.

The timing of the fall hummingbird migration occurs when their natural food is most abundant. However, you can enjoy this amazing spectacle up-close by keeping your feeders full of clear, fresh sugar water through at least the end October, and enjoying the company of these enchanting little gems as they make a rest stop in your yard!

Send your nature-related questions to naturewatch@austin.rr.com and we'll do our best to answer them.

REMEMBER, PLEASE:

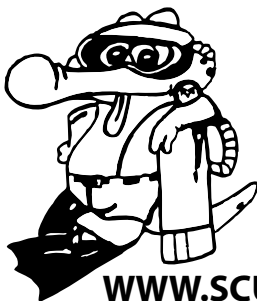
Austin leash laws require all dogs to be on a leash when off the owner's premises.



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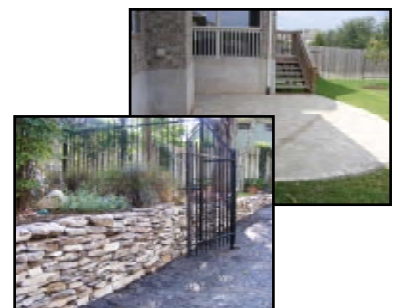
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Avery Ranch Real Estate News

Provided by: *Shaista Salahuddin* GRI, REALTOR®

Buying a home

Source (Lending Tree.com)

Is now the right time to buy a home? Use these few tips to find out

With historically low interest rates, today, a monthly mortgage payment can cost no more than a monthly rent check. So, why rent when you can buy for the same monthly payments? It depends on your financial situation, your plans for the future and, perhaps most importantly, the lifestyle you prefer.

Potential tax break

You can usually deduct mortgage interest as well as property taxes on your tax return, which can mean big savings. If you're in a 28% tax bracket and have a \$150,000 mortgage at 7%, the first full year you own your home you'll most likely be able to deduct more than \$10,000 in interest. That translates into a tax savings of almost \$3,000. In addition, even if you sell your principal residence for more than what you paid, you may not have to pay capital gains taxes. (There are limits, so consult a financial advisor for advice on your particular tax situation.)

You can build equity

No matter how much rent you pay, 100 percent of your apartment still belongs to your landlord. But every time you make an amortized mortgage payment, you own a little more of your house. Initially, interest makes up the vast majority of your payments, but the proportion is constantly shifting in your favor. If real estate values rise, you'll be even farther ahead. The longer you plan to stay put, the more of this benefit you will reap.

Pride of ownership

A house may be an investment, but first and foremost it's a home for your family. Even without the financial benefits, many people like the stability and sense of pride that comes with owning a home



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Year to date as of August 4, 2008 there have been 269 properties on the market in Avery Ranch:

- 98 Properties for sale**
- 24 Properties Under Contract/Pending Closing**
- 147 Properties Sold/Closed**

(Source: Austin Multiple Listing Service)

THE RANCH REVIEW



Pet Waste: Dealing with a Real Problem in Suburbia

Pet waste is not the predominant or most toxic pollutant in urban streams, but it is one of many small sources of pollution that can cumulatively have a big impact if left unmanaged. In North Central Texas the estimated dog population is 1.2 million. The average dog produces three to four pounds of waste daily, according to the Food and Drug Administration. That's about 900,000 pounds of dog poop produced every day in North Texas. Add to this figure cats and other smaller pets, and a significant volume of waste is being generated daily.

Pet waste contains bacteria and parasites, as well as organic matter and nutrients, notably nitrogen and phosphorous.

Some of the diseases that can be spread from pet waste are:

- Campylobacteriosis- a bacterial infection that causes diarrhea in humans.
- Salmonellosis- the most common bacterial infection transmitted to humans from animals. Symptoms include fever, muscle aches, headache, vomiting, and diarrhea.
- Toxocaris- roundworms transmitted from animals to humans. Symptoms include vision loss, rash, fever, or cough.

In addition to these diseases, the organic matter and nutrients contained in pet waste can degrade water quality. When pet waste is washed into a surface water body, the waste decays. This process of breaking down the organic matter in the waste uses up dissolved oxygen and releases ammonia. Low oxygen levels, increased ammonia and warm summer water temperatures can kill fish.

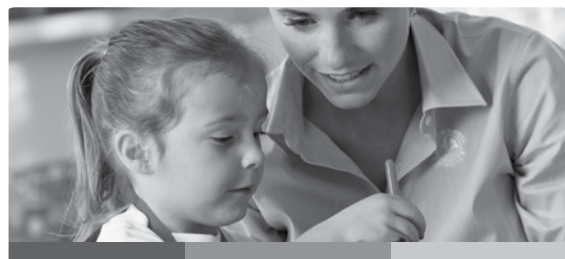
Excess phosphorous and nitrogen added to surface waters can lead to cloudy, green water from accelerated algae and weed growth. Decay of this extra organic matter can depress oxygen levels, killing organisms. Objectionable odors can also occur.

Flies and other pest insects can also increase when pet waste is disposed of improperly, becoming a nuisance and adding another vector for disease transmission.

Managing pet waste properly is something that everyone can do to make a difference in their respective watersheds. Truly, proper individual actions result in significant water quality improvement when carried out by the majority. Unlike some forms of stormwater pollutants, pet waste can be easily and economically managed by the individual.

Sometimes, the 'out of sight, out of mind' attitude exists regarding pet waste. Employing this flawed thinking, waste is often disposed of in the street stormwater catch basin. Aside from dumping directly

(Continued on Page 9)



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Pet Waste - (Continued from page 8)

into a water body, this is the single worst place to dispose of waste. In the next rainstorm, the accumulated waste is transported quickly and efficiently to the nearby receiving water course, polluting it. That said, then, specifically what can be done?

Proper Onsite Disposal

Flush it: Pet waste itself (not the litter or bedding material) can be flushed down the toilet. The water from the toilet goes either to a septic system onsite or a sewage treatment plant that removes most pollutants before the water reaches its outlet. The used litter should be disposed of in a securely closed bag in the trash.

Bury it: You can bury the waste directly in the yard. Dig a hole or trench that is 6 inches deep, away from vegetable gardens, play areas, and away from any lake, stream, or well. Often, the woods is an ideal spot. Microorganisms in the top layer of soil will break down and digest the waste, releasing the nutrients for uptake by adjacent vegetation. Never add the waste as a fertilizer to the garden or to the compost pile. The disease organisms will continue to survive and create a significant health risk.

Trash it: Check local ordinances first. Putting pet waste in the trash is against the law in some communities. Even if legal and easy, it's not the best solution. Waste can contribute to the landfill problems in the state.

Leave it to someone else: Believe it or not, a number of

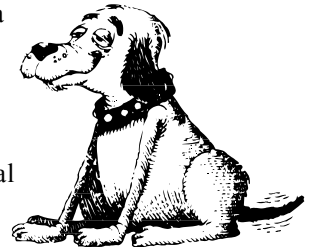
professional pet waste disposal services exist. These businesses will completely remove the waste from your yard and dispose of it themselves, for a fee.

Ordinances, signage and education: Many communities have "pooper-scooper" laws that govern pet waste cleanup. Some of these laws specifically require anyone who walks an animal off of their property to carry a bag, shovel, or scooper. Any waste left by the animal must be cleaned up immediately. Call your local health officer to find out more about pet waste regulations.

In recreation areas, trails, and public parks, 'scooper signage' along with plastic bag dispensers and disposal cans should be provided. This idea is especially critical at streamside or lake shore walking trails.

Public education is critical when addressing the pet waste problem. Interestingly, much of the public thinks of problems associated with pet waste as being only nuisance related-odors or aesthetics. An actual example of this is the woman walking her dog in the park who had brought along a brown paper bag to collect the 150 pound mastiff's waste. This she indeed dutifully did, and then proceeded to dispose of the bag by....tossing it into the lake!

Brochures, newsletters, signage, local



(Continued on Page 11)



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Kelly Peel, Sales Manager

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Pet Waste - (Continued from page 9)

public service announcements, and evening seminars are all ways to get the word out to the public. One very effective way to reach people is to have a flyer enclosed in tax bills or other municipally-generated mailings that go to all property owners.

Conclusion

The problem of pet waste disposal in suburbia is a real one. Research has indicated strongly that water quality is negatively impacted by this pollutant in Texas. However, unlike many other sources of water degradation in the state, improper pet waste management is a dilemma that can be easily corrected through education by organizations and common sense actions by individuals.

Let's all "doo" the right thing and pick up after our pets. Make a difference and go green.

Classified Ads

Personal classifieds (one time sell items, such as a used bike...) run at no charge to Avery Ranch residents, limit 30 words, please e-mail averyranch@peelinc.com.

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Sudoku

The challenge is to fill every row across, every column down, and every 3x3 box with the digits 1 through 9. Each 1 through 9 digit must appear only once in each row across, each column down, and each 3x3 box.

		5						4
			6	1			8	
4					5	3		1
					9	7		
		2	8					
						4		2
		9			8			
2		3				9		6
7	5	6						

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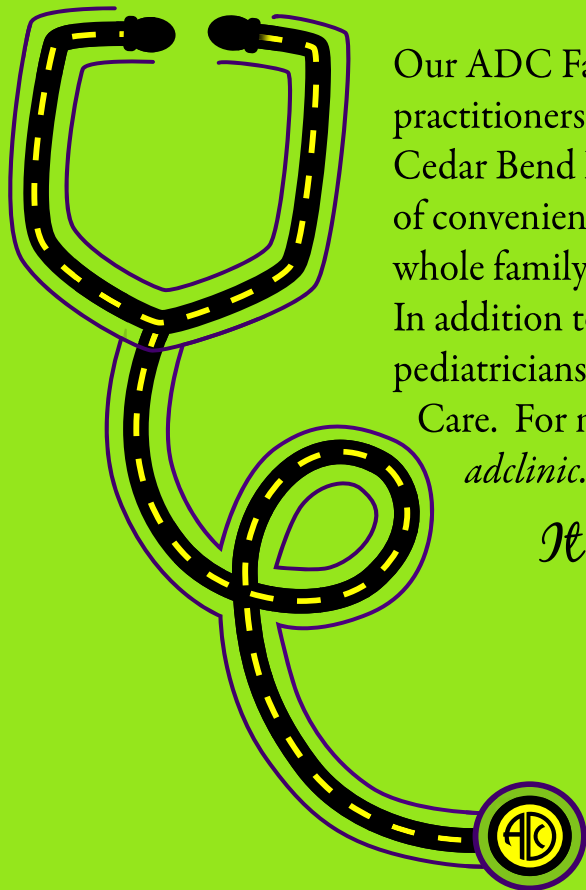
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